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Church branch seeks vets exposed to CIA drug tests

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A "whistleblower" branch of the Church of Scientology is looking for Army veterans who were the unwitting victims of a CIA-sponsored drug experimentation program during the 1960s through 1975.

The group, American Citizens for Honesty in Government, wants to file a class-action suit against the federal government for damages to approximately 2,500 soldiers. The group is offering free medical examinations to any veterans who suspect they were given the hallucinogenic drug "BZ" (or "QNB"), according to Joan Scholmann, who was in Little Rock

Friday to publicize the new campaign.

"No follow-up program was ever done on this drug," she said. The effects are largely unknown, although some veterans have said its effect on them at the time they ingested it was much worse than a bad LSD trip.

Ms. Schoelmann, who, with ACHG member Lynne Crawford, distributed leaflets about their campaign downtown during the Friday lunch hour, said her group hopes to find soldiers or their friends and family with a nationwide search.

"We want to alert people who will say, 'Hey, maybe that's why my brother's psychotic,' or 'Maybe that's why my son is a murderer.'"

"Nobody knows what's happened to them," she said of the soldiers who took part in the program at the Army's Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland. "Nobody's trying to find out."

A 1975 Senate investigation uncovered the fact that the Army sponsored the BZ experimentation program, part of a larger program that eventually involved nearly 7,000 servicemen.

The CIA paid for some of the experiments, sometimes channeling its funds through other federal agencies, apparently to hide its role.

The drug was then under consideration as an aerosol weapon. It caused dizziness, nausea, disorientation and amnesia for up to 80 hours — 10 times the length of a typical LSD trip.

Although the Army stopped experiments with the drug as the Senate investigation started, it still stockpiles BZ at arsenals, including the one in Pine Bluff.

Pharmacological researchers at universities around the country use BZ now as a tool. The federal National Institute of Health sponsors some of that research.

NIH apparently sometimes served as a CIA-conduit for drug experiment financing.

Ms. Schoelmann said the ACHG has evidence that about 2,500 soldiers

took the drug, usually by inhaling it during different simulated war scenes, but cannot identify them with information the Army released following a Freedom of Information request.

For more information, or to notify the ACHG that you may have been a participant in this program, write American Citizens for Honesty in Government, 2304 Rio Grande, Austin, Texas 78705, or call (512) 474-9546.